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## Still Seeking the Magic Mushroom

### Fungi, Pharmaceuticals, and Mysticism Without Religion

Hugh B. Urban

#### Summary

**A sweeping cultural history of our yearning for psychedelics to free us from both modern life and traditional religion.**

In 1957, *Life Magazine* published an article called “Seeking the Magic Mushroom” about a Mexican healing ritual centered on an obscure psychedelic: psilocybin mushrooms. Readers raced to experiment with the drug for their own spiritual, therapeutic, and recreational purposes until a psychedelic craze swept the nation. Today, though psilocybin has been transformed from a sacred fungus into a pharmaceutical product, many people still turn to the enigmatic mushroom to encounter profound spiritual experiences without the baggage of traditional religion.

In *Still Seeking the Magic Mushroom*, Hugh B. Urban examines the alluring promise of mysticism without religion. With psychedelics, one need not fast, flagellate, or even worship a god to encounter the transcendent; a carefully timed ingestion of psilocybin will suffice. But, Urban argues, stripping the trip from its religion came at a cost: the erasure of Indigenous culture and the eventual commercialization and scientification of the psychedelic underground. Urban shows that psychedelic mushrooms, far from the fringe or countercultural margins, have been central players in shaping American attitudes toward religion and science over the last century. He argues that our love affair with the intoxicating fungus reveals a deep frustration with a disenchanted world, desire for meaning beyond religion, yearning for nature amid ecological crisis, faith in science to save us, and the relentless power of capitalism to turn everything into commodities.

#### Contributor Bio

**Hugh B. Urban** is College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor at the Ohio State University. He is the author of numerous books including *Secrecy: Silence, Power and Religion*, also published by the University of Chicago Press.

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## Gator!

**The Making of America's Iconic Reptile, from First Encounters to Florida Man**

Mark V. Barrow, Jr.

### Summary

**What this intriguing—and unsettling—apex predator reveals about Americans' attempts to control and connect with the natural world.**

Both a flesh-and-blood critter and the stuff of legend, the alligator inspires as much awe as it does fear. While this apex predator survives mainly on fish, birds, snakes, turtles, and small mammals, it will consume almost anything, including pets, livestock, and—in rare cases—humans. Though dreaded as a man-eater, the alligator has also been cast as a lucrative commodity, a popular roadside attraction, a prized hunting trophy, and even an unlikely household pet.

*Gator!* tells the riveting story of this iconic predator. Historian Mark V. Barrow, Jr.—a native of Florida, a state famous for its alligators—traces the reptile's ancient lineage from the age of the dinosaurs to its current status as a cherished mascot and regional icon. He explores its role as a surrogate species, offering vital clues about the health of ecosystems, as well as its profound cultural weight as a totem for Indigenous communities, a mythical sewer-dweller in New York lore, and a disturbing tool of racial oppression used to dehumanize African Americans. Once over-hunted, the alligator has long been celebrated as a triumph of the federal Endangered Species Act. Barrow delves into the nuances of this comeback, one that offers both a cautionary tale of market-driven exploitation and a conservation success story.

An entertaining history of one of North America's most charismatic animals, *Gator!* explores how this reptile became a Florida emblem and a national enigma, transforming humans and alligators in the process.

### Contributor Bio

**Mark V. Barrow, Jr.** is professor of history at Virginia Tech and the author of *A Passion for Birds: American Ornithology after Audubon* and *Nature's Ghosts: Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology*. He grew up in Gainesville, Florida—deep in the heart of Gator Country—where his fascination with the American alligator first took root.

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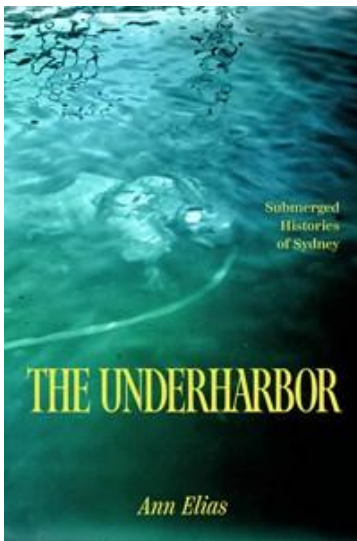
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## The Underharbor

### Submerged Histories of Sydney

Ann Elias

#### Summary

**An underwater look at Sydney that surfaces new and unfamiliar histories of people, objects, spaces, and environmental and social change.**

*The Underharbor* places the ocean at the center of a cultural history of Sydney, Australia, a place built on and around seawater, where the community is linked historically, emotionally, and psychologically to the water. Drawing on a series of vignettes that focus on Sydney's underwater dimensions—including the harbor's relationship to technological modernity, Indigenous ideas and practices, artistic experimentation, and scientific inquiry—Ann Elias creates a unique portrait of a city and its past. By shifting the terrestrial perspective to the subaquatic, Elias uncovers an area filled with political meaning, poetic significance, and ideological struggles.

Few harbors are as researched as Sydney's, where fishing, exploration, colonialism, warfare, science, and industry all shaped cultural ideas about underwater space. Between 1850 to 1950, only a few groups of people had access to the remote underharbor: Indigenous divers and First Nations peoples, who were dispossessed by colonizers; divers working primarily to further the maritime industrialization of the growing city and to salvage objects from the harbor floor; researchers in the emerging field of marine science who dove for first-hand observation; and beachcombers, naturalists, and dredgers who got to know the underharbor by bringing it to the surface. Through press stories, models, illustrations, maps, and photographic and cinematic representations, *The Underharbor* reveals how these watery visions of Sydney shifted over the course of a century.

#### Contributor Bio

**Ann Elias** is professor emeritus of art history and visual culture at the University of Sydney. She is the author of *Coral Empire: Underwater Oceans, Colonial Tropics, Visual Modernity*; *Useless Beauty: Flowers and Australian Art*; and *Camouflage Australia: Art, Nature, Science, and War*.

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## Growth Machines

### On the Hollow Joys of Consumption in the Desert of Economic Life

Mark Joseph Stelzner

#### Summary

**A provocative look at America's compulsion to consume and our obsession's surprising—and strange—origins.**

In a capitalist society, people sell their labor to purchase staples like food, shelter, and anxiety medication. That's the equation of everyday economic life that we've always been told is true. Except, is it really that simple anymore? No matter how unmaterialistic you may think you are, odds are that deep within is a drive to consume because it feels good: books you won't read, clothes you won't like and might wear even less, a replacement phone whose novelty runs out as quickly as its upgrade hits the market. But what drives this impulse?

In *Growth Machines*, Mark Joseph Stelzner shows how today's consumers are now programmed by a US economy intent on infinite growth to work for goods they've been convinced they need and conditioned to want. Stelzner establishes the gaps between economic thinking and economic reality, arguing that consumption is no longer just a reflection of needs, but rather, it reflects a need for transaction—in many cases, a treat we seek out because it feels good. We work not only to be able to consume the essentials for living, but also to consume for consumption's sake. Yet such consumption doesn't make us happier. Stelzner traces this strange nature of consumption to an environmental source: an economy that demands growth. To keep its economy pumping, the US must keep Americans consuming. This makes Stelzner's book an uncomfortable reflection on how we internalize our economy. To be an American is to consume; to consume is what makes America.

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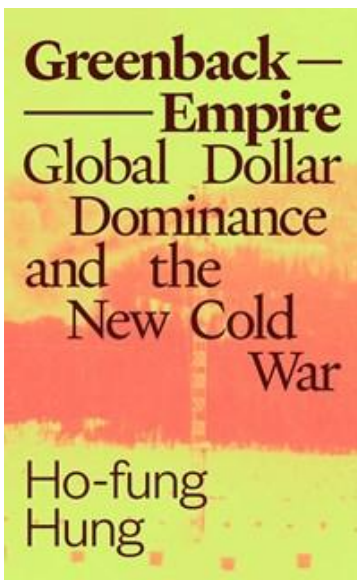
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#### Contributor Bio

**Mark Joseph Stelzner** is associate professor of economics at Connecticut College. He has published in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, *The Review of Black Political Economy*, and the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, and his work has been featured in the *Economist* and the *Nation*.

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## Greenback Empire

Global Dollar Dominance and the New Cold War

Ho-fung Hung

### Summary

**A critical history of the US dollar's dominance in the world economy—and what has kept China's from overtaking it.**

The dollar is the primary currency of the world economy. With China now rivaling the United States on the world stage, a critically important question hangs in the balance: will the Chinese renminbi challenge the status of the dollar and, in so doing, deprive America of its "exorbitant privilege"?

In *Greenback Empire*, Ho-fung Hung offers a powerful account of why, as American shares of global production, ownership, and trade continue to decline, its currency has retained the support of governments and investors around the world.

For six decades, Hung shows, the dominance of the dollar has rested on the security umbrella that the US offers to the world's wealthiest countries, including oil producers. To these countries, support for the value of the dollar is a condition of maintaining US protection. While China has become a serious geopolitical and economic rival to the US, the Chinese state's airtight control of its financial system has delayed the free trading of the renminbi, limiting its internationalization. In short, the same state power that engineered growth in China's economy is the same state power that has stifled its currency's rise in opposition to the dollar—for now. Hung's *Greenback Empire* is an essential history of the dollar's prowess, indispensable for understanding the future of the global monetary system.

### Contributor Bio

**Ho-fung Hung** is the Henry M. and Elizabeth P. Wiesenfeld Professor in political economy with the Sociology Department and the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. He is author of *City on the Edge: Hong Kong under Chinese Rule*, *Clash of Empires: From "Chimerica" to the "New Cold War"*, and *The China Boom: Why China Will Not Rule the World*.

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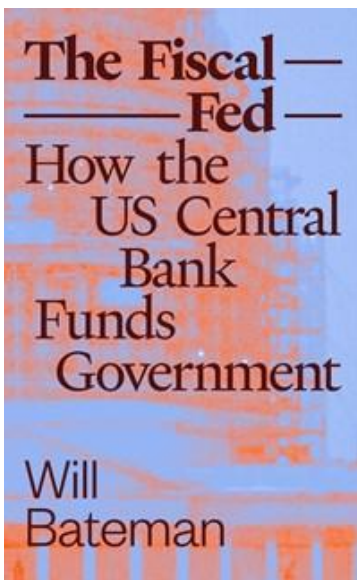
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## The Fiscal Fed

**How the US Central Bank Funds Government**

Will Bateman

### Summary

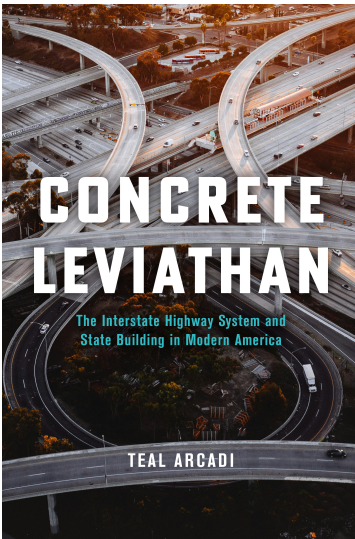
**A revelatory history of how the Federal Reserve finances American power.**

Central banks, we are told, are economic superpowers that must remain independent of modern democratic governments. The US Federal Reserve's presumed insulation from politics affords it the autonomy and credibility to control inflation and the national economy's stability—or so the story goes.

In *The Fiscal Fed*, Will Bateman offers a deeply sourced, empirical history that shows the Fed's primary function is actually, and has always been, fiscal—that is, sustaining the market for Treasury borrowing that makes up the difference between federal spending and revenues from taxation. Bateman combs Fed meeting transcripts, staff notes, financial accounts, and legal documents, to trace loans and public-debt purchases since the central bank's founding. The result is a milestone work that reveals how, for most of the Fed's history, its transactions were aimed at government financing—either by providing cheap credit to close budget gaps or by manipulating yields on government debt. The Fed's support for government finance is a feature, not a bug, of American economic institutions.

### Contributor Bio

**Will Bateman** is a professor at the Australian National University, College of Law, Governance and Policy. His research has been published in the *Modern Law Review*, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, *Review of International Political Economy* and he is the author of *Public Finance and Parliamentary Constitutionalism*.



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## Concrete Leviathan

The Interstate Highway System and State Building in Modern America

Teal Arcadi

### Summary

Offers an insightful new way to understand the construction and consequences of the US interstate highway system, expanding and revising the common story.

In *Concrete Leviathan*, historian Teal Arcadi denaturalizes the interstate highway system, interrogating the ideologies, fiscal mechanisms, and legal tools that led to the construction of a vast and permanent physical infrastructure—and then made it all but impossible to change course. Arcadi argues that the US interstate highway system was built by an unaccountable regime of law and political economy that systematically created and insulated structures of governance. The power of these administrative and physical structures has been such that even when people have mobilized to oppose or try to change them, their protests have tended only to reveal the extent and power of the infrastructural state.

At the same time, *Concrete Leviathan* shows how resistance to this infrastructure's inequities generated new democratic ideas and practices, pointing toward more participatory structures of government and more equitable models of state building.

### Contributor Bio

**Teal Arcadi** is a legal and economic historian. His work focuses on issues of participatory democracy, economic power, and the provision of equitable public goods.

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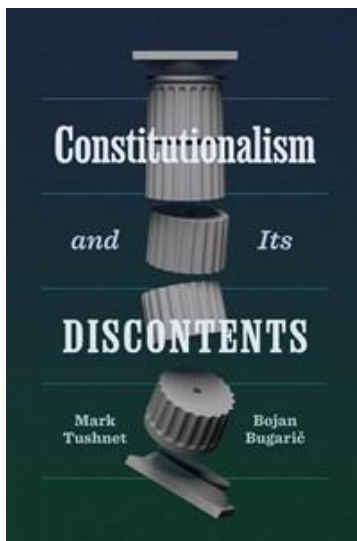
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## Constitutionalism and Its Discontents

Mark Tushnet, Bojan Bugarić

### Summary

**A thoughtful and provocative meditation on both the potential and limits of constitutionalism.**

In the early twenty-first century, constitutionalism confronts numerous pressures and critiques. Some prominent critics are concerned that constitutionalism's modern form, in which high courts play a large role, limits popular self-governance. By committing their nations to detailed social and economic policies—from neoliberal requirements for balanced budgets to constitutionalized social welfare and environmental rights—many modern constitutions might make promises they cannot keep and be unduly rigid in the face of changing social, economic, and environmental conditions. Meanwhile, the rise of proto-authoritarian elected leaders around the world shows that constitutions are vulnerable to, and may even enable, democratic backsliding.

Mark Tushnet and Bojan Bugarić argue that addressing each of these serious concerns through constitutional design and innovation is potentially valuable, but paradoxically, every remedy also carries with it the possibility that it will intensify the very conditions it seeks to ameliorate. Instead, Tushnet and Bugarić propose a "thin" idea of constitutionalism and suggest that we should scale back our expectations for what constitutionalism can achieve. Political mobilization, led by people attuned to the economic and cultural causes of democratic backsliding, is a better bet.

### Contributor Bio

**Mark Tushnet** is the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Law, emeritus at Harvard Law School.

**Bojan Bugarić** is professor of law at the University of Sheffield.

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## The Politics of Authenticity

### First-Personal Truths and Democratic Claims

Nina Hagel

#### Summary

#### **A qualified defense of authenticity claims in contemporary politics.**

On both the Left and Right, we see a range of political claims cast in terms of authenticity, from transgender persons seeking recognition of who they truly are to religious business owners requesting exemptions from antidiscrimination laws. For claimants, what is often at stake is an inner self that would be harmed if changed or concealed. At the same time, many scholars are skeptical of authenticity claims, with some worrying that they are too nebulous and inward-looking and others fearing that they contain too much anti-democratic potential. There is also the added difficulty of determining when and on what grounds to accept a claim of authenticity.

Nina Hagel argues that while invoking authenticity has serious risks, it remains a crucial democratic resource. Through an engagement with canonical and contemporary political theorists, and an analysis of current political struggles centering on authenticity, Hagel advances a defense of authenticity's democratic potential, alongside a practice for interpreting and invoking such claims. While one might assume that this perspective clashes with the post-modern view that there is no true self outside of politics and history, Hagel puts forward a non-essentialist understanding of authenticity that emphasizes subject formation and emancipation. Hagel argues that authenticity claims best support democracy when they collectively steward, rather than overcome, the social powers that shape our identities. We ignore authenticity claims at our peril, since the objects of such claims are the norms and practices that make us who we are.

#### Contributor Bio

**Nina Hagel** is assistant professor of government at Wesleyan University.

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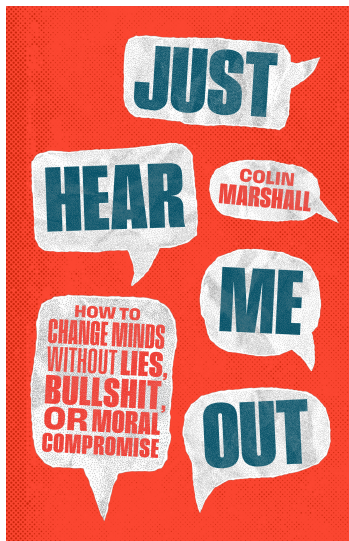
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## Just Hear Me Out

**How to Change Minds Without Lies, Bullshit, or Moral Compromise**

Colin Marshall

### Summary

**A guide to persuasion for people who want to change minds without manipulation or coercion.**

Most of us have given up on persuasion. We say our problems are too pressing, people are too polarized, and success is too dubious—and it's true! After all, when was the last time you heard someone actually change their mind? Instead, if we want to improve our persuasive powers, self-help books often ask us to stoop to dishonest, manipulative tricks that rarely achieve lasting results. But perhaps there is a way to persuade people that is neither hopelessly misguided nor morally suspect.

In *Just Hear Me Out*, philosopher Colin Marshall describes a persuasive method that is both effective and ethical. Rather than share a flurry of tips for how to win friends and influence people, Marshall invites us to take up persuasion as fundamentally *civil work*, good both for our conscience and our communities. Real-world persuaders such as Jane Addams, Daryl Davis, and Fred Rogers show us an ethical route, he argues, to changing hearts through patience, respect, and compassion.

Accessible, practical, and buoyed by hope, *Just Hear Me Out* offers a powerful method for all who want to persuade others but aren't interested in winning at any cost. When it works, people don't just change their minds; they discover anew how to value our common humanity.

### Contributor Bio

**Colin Marshall** is professor of philosophy at the University of Washington, Seattle. He is the author of *Compassionate Moral Realism*.

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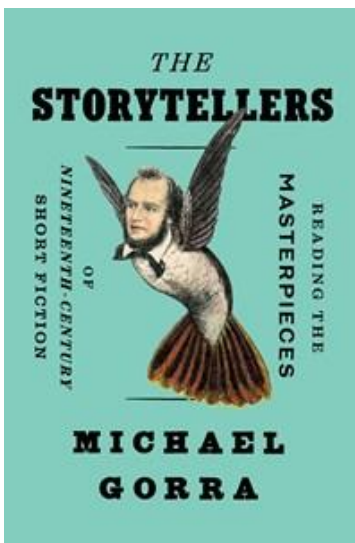
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## The Storytellers

Reading the Masterpieces of Nineteenth-Century Short Fiction

Michael Gorra

### Summary

Tracing the origins of the modern short story, Michael Gorra provides the first fully realized picture of a century's worth of great tales.

*The Storytellers* offers a far-reaching account of the rich tradition of short narratives that flourished in nineteenth-century Europe and America, one that both prepared for and eventually gave way to the modern short story. Tracing unexpected resemblances across languages and decades, Michael Gorra restores a wide-angle view of the form in which works usually treated as stand-alone classics reveal themselves as parts of a single, lively conversation.

What unites these tales, Gorra argues, is their blend of novelty and unity. The book's heart lies in a series of accessible readings of great tales by Herman Melville, Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Guy de Maupassant, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Arthur Conan Doyle, Sarah Orne Jewett, Charles Chesnut, and many more. Beyond its consideration of individual works, *The Storytellers* examines the formal and thematic concerns that bind the century together: the use of frame tales, accounts of social marginality, and an abundance of ghosts and uncanny coincidences. Over time, Gorra shows, these qualities yielded to a cooler realism, with Anton Chekhov as the key transitional figure. His compressed studies of ordinary lives inspired the modern short story and consigned the gothic flourishes of earlier tales to genre fiction.

What do we want from a story? What makes a tale worth telling? The nineteenth-century tale sought not the grand "meaning of life" promised by the novel, Gorra shows, but sudden revelations from singular events. *The Storytellers* gives readers an incomparable guide to a vast body of tales that still has the power to thrill and entertain.

### Contributor Bio

**Michael Gorra** is the Mary Augusta Jordan Professor Emeritus of English Language and Literature at Smith College. He is the author of *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Biography, and *The Saddest Words: William Faulkner's Civil War*. Gorra is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a regular contributor to the *New York Review of Books*. He has received a Public Scholar Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Nona Balakian Citation of the National Book Critics Circle for his work as a reviewer.

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## The Whiteness Between Us

### Early Modern Playbooks of Racial Triangulation

Noémie Ndiaye

#### Summary

**A theorization of the representational juxtapositions, frictions, and connections between Black people and other non-white people in early modern European theatre.**

Over the course of the seventeenth century, European drama was an important tool for whiteness to imagine itself at the top of an aspirational structure of power relations. Indeed, that structure could only be aspirational at a time when Europeans were profoundly divided along easily racializable religious and ethnic lines, and when their sovereignty was threatened by the Ottoman Empire. It was to strengthen this emerging consciousness of racial whiteness, Noémie Ndiaye argues, that European drama engaged in a form of racial triangulation, fitting Muslim, Jewish, Indigenous, Romani, and Asian characters into a spurious black/white racial binary.

Focusing on English, Spanish, and French drama from 1580 to 1715, *The Whiteness Between Us* shows how plays became a crucial tool to position not only black people but any non-white community in the new racial architecture that white supremacy sought to build. Ndiaye reveals the stage of this era as a space for wish fulfillment, enabling participants to imagine and work towards a whiter future.

The early modern playbooks of racial triangulation that Ndiaye brings to light can and have been reactivated for white supremacist purposes in our own day and age. Partly in response to the contemporary threat of white nationalism, scholars and students have sought to unearth the early modern roots of racial whiteness and white supremacy. Ndiaye's book participates in this wave of interest, offering several innovations, including its capacious transnational claims.

#### Contributor Bio

**Noémie Ndiaye** is associate professor of Renaissance and Early Modern English Literature at the University of Chicago. She works on early modern English, French, and Spanish theater with a critical focus on race. She is the author of the multi-award-winning *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* and coeditor, with Lia Markey, of *Seeing Race Before Race: Visual Culture and the Racial Matrix in the Premodern World*.

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